

## **2010 Michigan Legislative Assessment**

### **Douglas Williams, State Legislative Chairman**

The period between our department convention and now has not produced many positives for us legislatively. The primary culprit has been the state's economy and its impact upon all of us. We have managed to influence that legislation which has little fiscal impact upon the taxpayers of the state (feel good legislation) and I am sure we will be able to continue this. However, this legislation does nothing to help us in our primary stated goals.

I continue to advocate for more financial assistance for our Veterans Service Offices, and while those Senators and Representatives I talk to are sympathetic to our plight, they inform me there is little chance of any measure passing that would increase taxes, and as that is the source of our funding we must work with what we have.

I am not optimistic about our future and it would not surprise me to see our funding cut in the coming years. The condition of the state's economy and jobs picture is not good now and the recovery will take quite some time.

At our June convention, I encouraged our Department Executive Committee to consider the need to redistrict our department. With the coming census, we should be looking closely at those areas of the state that stand a strong chance of losing representation and be prepared to make whatever changes are necessary. If the unemployment picture remains unchanged or fails to improve significantly it has been said that we could lose a minimum of two legislative seats.

I suspect those heavily populated areas of the state close to automotive plants will show the highest loss of population.

I have advocated and encouraged the Commanders Group to support only those candidates who show a strong record of support for our veterans goals and objectives. As 2010 is the year we will elect a new Governor, I have also stated that our chartered veterans groups should support any candidate who has stated publicly that they will have as part of their platform the establishment of an Office of Veterans Affairs within state government. Being a part of any other department in the state places us at a disadvantage and we become lost in those agency budgets and problems.

I am sure our efforts in this regard will be viewed as detrimental to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, and I want all to know that we have established a working relation with them (that is good), in order to provide the important veterans service work that must be continued for our state's veterans. We must continue this relationship as we are dependent upon them for the grant

money needed to provide this all-important service. Our attempts to establish our own voice in state government must be viewed as an effort by us to acquire a stronger voice and not be connected to any agency. This has become most important now as the passage of Senate bill 250 has restructured our programs and the way we will provide this service. I urge all to be polite and professional while we lobby for change.

I encourage the Department to consider placing a paid staff member in a position of College Campus Legion Advocate/Recruiter. This position would be responsible for contacting each college and university in the state. It could work with the Department Membership Chairman and would enhance our membership by bringing younger members into our organization. We currently are missing a great opportunity and with the passing of our World War II members, we continue to fall in membership. We must sell our Legion to these younger veterans and presently we do not do this. We must look to the future and these college veterans are our future. As each war seems to spawn new and younger veterans groups and the current Montgomery GI Bill has provided these younger veterans the ability to receive a college education, it would undoubtedly help if we brought them into our Legion and solicited their support for our programs. We must view the younger veteran as a benefit to our Legion and encourage them to accept leadership roles.

I see a need to review those goals set by the Commanders Group in light of our current funding vehicle (Grants) through the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. I don't think this has been done for some time and a review is in order.

I also set on the advisory board along with our Department Veterans Service Officer, enacted under SB 250 and am encouraged by the agreement between the five chartered organizations. The delivery of service to our States Veterans is of paramount importance to all of us and joining together to get this done is a big positive.